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Concern over excess water releases from Trinity Lake

From William (Bill) Koch, Ph.D. Lewiston Aug 3, 2016

This open letter to my fellow citizens of Trinity County is intended to inform and to raise questions about the current 104-day (4/21/16 to 8/2/16) on-going excess water release down the Trinity River. I must admit that when I first read about the excess water release program, being touted by the Trinity River Restoration Program, I didn't really realize the full impact of what we were being told, so I decided to look into the matter a little closer, Here's what I found.

I first went to the Trinity River Restoration Program, www.trrp.net/restore/flows/current, and took the recommended water release schedule cubic foot/second listed there, added them together and converted them, by using standardized conversion formulas, and then came up with the total amount of water release for the 104-day period. I subtracted the normal river flow rate for the same 104-day period of 450 cfs from the TRRP suggested rate and came up with a total net amount of excess water release of 143,052,307,200 gallons (I have given a copy of my work to The Trinity Journal — If you want to check my accuracy for you may request a copy from me).

Let me write that out so you too can feel the impact of the total quantity of the excess water release — One hundred forty-three billion, fifty-two million, three hundred seven thousand, two hundred gallons! We need to have something to compare that number of total gallonage with in order to gauge the magnitude. I went to the Whiskeytown Lake website, www.nps.gov/whis/index htm, to find its capacity and discovered that Whiskeytown Lake could be filled approximately two times with the total amount of the current excess Trinity River water flow. Further, I noticed the electronic Caltrans sign board on Eureka Way as I traveled into Redding, which says: Severe Drought-Help Save Water. So how does all this square with our community life, considering the preciousness of clean water to our human existence, I questioned?

I wondered what is the value of 143,052,307,200 gallons?

I first went to the Trinity River Restoration Program office and was told this particular water release was developed by a complicated formula (I'd suggest anyone interested in knowing how the decision was decided upon should make a visit to the TRRP office). I was also told the main reason for the excess water release was to allow TRRP to put a quantity of rocks in the river in order to study the effect of how some of those rocks would tumble down the river, thus filling salmon spawning areas. Is that a good use of the water, one would ask, considering the severe drought conditions currently in place?

I really wanted to focus on "What is the value of that excess water?" What would that amount of water sell for on the open market?

I four the answer on the Westlands Water District, wwd.ca.gov/water-management/water-rates-2. Spec. Lally, the Gold Standard price for the Trinity Lake water, paid to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation by WWD, is \$98.70 per acre-foot. So the total value of the 143,052,529,200 gallons of excess water is a